

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

February 20, 2001
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Mosher, Councilmembers Creighton, Davidson, Degginger, Lee, and Noble

ABSENT: Deputy Mayor Marshall

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. with Mayor Mosher presiding. There was no executive session.

2. Study Session

(a) 1999 Comparative Cities Performance Report

City Manager Steve Sarkozy described the City's involvement in the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) Comparative Cities program. The Comparative Cities report provides performance measure information for seven major City of Bellevue functions and discusses these measures in comparison to other cities. Mr. Sarkozy said Bellevue is a leader in ICMA's program.

Interim Finance Director Gary Ameling said the Comparative Cities Performance Report is one of several tools used by staff on an ongoing basis. Other methods of evaluating and improving City services include surveys and stakeholder outreach activities, annual performance measure scorecards, department-specific efforts such as the Police Department's involvement in the 1999 Benchmark Cities Survey, and efficiency audits. Mr. Ameling attributed the success of Bellevue's program to the supportive managerial and political environment which encourages dialogue and focuses on ways to improve operations rather than punishing staff when performance measures do not reflect desired service and/or efficiency levels. He said the program helps improve departmental accountability, helps the City to operate in a businesslike manner, and provides staff and Council with information used in making budget decisions.

Rich Siegel, Performance and Outreach Coordinator, said the Comparative Cities program looks beyond the bottom line to identify and evaluate accomplishments and opportunities for improvement. Bellevue's 1999 Comparative Cities Report looks at 55 cities out of 101 cities and counties participating in the survey. Mr. Siegel said Bellevue was recognized by ICMA as a

“Best Practice” City. Staff received more than a dozen inquiries from other cities in 2000 asking about the City’s report process and methodology.

Mr. Siegel said the Comparative Cities Performance Report is a longitudinal report indicating trends over time, in this instance for the past four years. Although more than 4,000 data elements are collected by ICMA, Bellevue chose to focus on 27 elements or operational areas for annual review including police, parks, fire, and code enforcement. Information services was added this year because of the major role of technology in overall City operations.

Mr. Siegel said Bellevue data was compared to cities with similar population, square mileage, population density, and spending per capita. It became apparent that each city is unique to some extent and Bellevue did not match any one city for every characteristic reported. For example, cities that were similar in population were not similar in terms of population density.

Mr. Siegel noted that the 1999 report provides four-year trend comparisons. He cautioned that although ICMA provides specific reporting guidelines in order to enhance the comparability of data between cities, there are still problems related to the inconsistency of definitions and data collection techniques.

Mr. Siegel reviewed key findings of the 1999 Comparative Cities Performance Report. Bellevue’s crime rates remained low during the four year period from 1996 to 1999. Response times to critical, life threatening emergencies are slightly faster than the ICMA average. The clearance rate for Part I Violent Crimes is higher than the ICMA average. The average response time to fire calls is below the ICMA average, although Bellevue’s ability to contain fire incidents to the room of origin is significantly better than the ICMA average. Basic Life Support and Advanced Life Support response times continue to be slightly longer than average. However, the percentage of cardiac arrest patients who arrive at the hospital alive is among the highest in the nation. Voluntary compliance with zoning and nuisance complaints occurs within fewer days than the ICMA average. Bellevue’s park expenditures per capita are higher than other cities, and surveys consistently indicate that residents view clean and well-maintained parks and park facilities as important.

Mr. Siegel described how the comparative performance information is used by staff to improve services and efficiency. A couple of years ago, Coral Springs, Florida said they wanted to be just like Bellevue in the way the City reports data. As a result, the Bellevue Police Department discovered a auto theft deterrent program at Coral Springs which it decided to duplicate. The program issues warnings to vehicles that may be vulnerable to crime for a variety of reasons including “packages visible in car” and “vehicle left unlocked.” The warning notices also provide safety tips and encourage citizens to call 911 to report crimes.

Mr. Siegel feels the Comparative Cities program is very worthwhile for the City, and he noted that Bellevue consistently delivers high-quality programs and services from year to year. Mayor Mosher said the Comparative Cities report is valuable to Council and he is pleased with management’s support of the program.

Responding to Mr. Creighton, Mr. Ameling said since participating cities do not respond to all performance measures, different cities may be included in the comparison for any given measure. In further response to Mr. Creighton, Mr. Siegel said ICMA is very specific about what information should be provided for each performance measure. ICMA electronically checks the data submitted by cities and requests clarification or additional information if warranted. Mr. Ameling said Bellevue staff contact other cities to learn more about their best practices. Mr. Sarkozy noted that the Comparative Cities data is one of several tools used by staff to develop an overall picture of how Bellevue is doing compared to other cities.

In response to Mr. Degginger, Mr. Siegel provided examples of what Bellevue has learned through its participation in the Comparative Cities program. Although Bellevue's juvenile arrest rate is slightly lower than the ICMA average, juveniles commit a high portion of Bellevue's crimes in relation to the number of juveniles living in the city. Subsequently, the Police Department implemented School Resource Officer (SRO) programs and the Cops and Docs program to address juvenile crime. The high number of arrests may be partly attributable to the Police Department's reorganization in 1998 which placed more emphasis on juvenile crimes. Mr. Siegel acknowledged there are problems with the comparability of data and that some cities report incorrect data. However, he reiterated that this is one of many management tools and information sources used by the City. He feels the process provides a good forum for discussion between staff and Council.

Dr. Davidson commended Bellevue's involvement in the Comparative Cities program. He anticipates that the information and comparisons will become increasingly valuable with the City's continued participation.

Mr. Lee feels the program is beneficial to the City, particularly as an opportunity to learn from and share practices with other cities. He would like a better understanding, however, of why some cities are doing better than others. He requested a list of what the City has learned through its involvement in the program.

In response to Mr. Noble, Mr. Siegel said mobile data terminals (MDTs) used in Tempe, Arizona, provide more accurate emergency response data. Bellevue plans to implement MDTs this year. In further response to Mr. Noble, Police Deputy Chief David Gans said the data on juvenile arrests helps the Police Department make decisions about the utilization of resources. He said Bellevue's high number of officers per capita indicates the city is well protected, and he noted that crime statistics are decreasing.

In response to Mayor Mosher, Mr. Ameling said Bellevue's favorable cardiac patient survival rate is due partly to the City's tiered dispatch approach and the fact that dispatchers are well trained to direct CPR over the phone.

In response to Mr. Noble, Mr. Siegel said participants in the Comparative Cities program do not provide answers to every question. He said Bellevue has been involved in revising the questionnaires and is frequently used as an example for other cities.

(b) 2001-2002 Budget Critique

Mr. Sarkozy said the purpose of this agenda item is to review the recent budget process and identify opportunities for improvement. Mr. Ameling referred to page SS 2-4 of the Council packet for a list of the major budget process components in which Council was involved.

Mike Sigsbee, Budget Manager, said the Stakeholder Outreach component included a budget survey, meetings with citizens, and three public hearings. The second component, Council Budget Workshops, included discussions of the financial forecast, a review of stakeholder outreach activities, and Council budget priority setting. The third major component is the Council Review Process which included thematic presentations of budget proposals.

Mr. Degginger said the financial forecasts were very helpful, but he felt the budget workshops did not present enough specific information. He found the thematic organization of budget proposals to be cumbersome and would prefer to review proposals organized by department. Mr. Degginger would have liked more information on the Leadership Team's review and scoring process. He said volume 3 of the budget documents containing comprehensive line item information was helpful and he would prefer to receive it earlier in the next budget process. Mr. Degginger would like follow-up information on projects indicating how they are completed in comparison to their budgets. Mr. Ameling said most projects are completed under or close to their original budgets. He noted that Council tends to hear only about projects that are over budget and require additional funding.

Mr. Noble found the thematic organization and presentation of budget proposals confusing, and he would prefer a combination of the department and thematic approaches. He liked the individual written descriptions of budget requests. Mr. Noble commended staff members for their responsiveness to questions and requests for additional information throughout the budget process.

Mr. Lee said he was uncomfortable with the thematic presentation of budget proposals. He was pleased with the financial forecast information and employee involvement in the overall process. He said specific budget presentations were sometimes quite lengthy. Mr. Lee feels the budget was more staff-driven than Council-driven. He said budget recommendations did not always correspond to department priorities.

Mr. Creighton said Bellevue's budget process is exceptional compared to many organizations. In terms of stakeholder outreach, he finds the survey information to be more helpful than other approaches. If the thematic approach to the budget is preferred by staff, Mr. Creighton feels Council needs a better understanding of its merits. He was disappointed with the lack of information provided to Council regarding executive compensation. Mr. Creighton would like to move forward soon with discussions about the unallocated portion of the capital budget and to consider possible tax reductions, particularly in the area of utility taxes.

Mayor Mosher liked the thematic approach because it provided a good overall picture of the budget. He said the budget was developed around Council priorities, and Council is to review the budget with its priorities in mind. He feels it is appropriate for staff to develop the initial budget for Council's review. Mr. Mosher said the Transportation presentation was too detailed and could have provided more of a "big picture" perspective.

Mr. Ameling summarized Council's feedback and said a thematic organization of the budget could be combined with department-specific budget presentations. Mr. Degginger said the thematic approach might be most effective for functional areas such as technology. In general the approach made it difficult to review the budget in terms of historical trends. Mr. Creighton concurred.

Mr. Lee reiterated his point that the budget should be more Council-driven. For instance, he would have liked to see a proposal to reduce utility taxes for Council's consideration. Mr. Ameling noted that under state law, the City Manager is required to develop and present a balanced budget.

Mr. Ameling thanked Council for the honest feedback. Mayor Mosher praised staff members for their work and their willingness to try different approaches to the budget. Mr. Degginger thanked staff for their time and attention to his questions throughout the process. Mr. Ameling acknowledged the work of budget staff who generally prepared responses for Council.

3. Council Business [Regular Session Agenda Item 6]

At 7:43 p.m., Mayor Mosher suggested Council report on Council Business. Mr. Degginger attended the Bellevue Economic Partnership's Tech 2001 luncheon.

Mr. Creighton met with state legislators to discuss transportation issues. He serves on the Seafair Board of Directors and solicited Council input regarding potential Seafair events on the Eastside.

Mr. Lee attended the Association of Washington Cities meeting in Olympia and local meetings regarding the 148th Avenue sidewalk improvement project, Bellevue Community College access project, and Lake Hills Shopping Center redevelopment.

Mr. Noble attended the East Bellevue Community Council meeting in which redevelopment of the Lake Hills Shopping Center was discussed. He attended the Eastside Transportation Partnership meeting and noted that Deputy Mayor Marshall was elected to chair the group for the coming year. Mr. Noble attended the Trans-Lake Washington Study Executive Committee meeting. He said two open house/public meetings are scheduled for the Eastside to discuss alternatives.

Mayor Mosher attended a meeting with King County Councilmember David Irons and the Association of Washington Cities meeting in Olympia.

At 7:55 p.m., Mayor Mosher declared recess to the regular session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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